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A
S E R M O N,
PREACHED BEFORE
THE HONOURABLE SOCIETY
OF
LINCOLN'S INN,
On THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 1798;
Being the Day appointed
BY HIS MAJESTY'S PROCLAMATION
FOR
A GENERAL THANKSGIVING.

BY WILLIAM JACKSON, B. D. *K*
STUDENT OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,
AND PREACHER TO THE SOCIETY.

OXFORD:
SOLD BY J. COOKE, AND BY MESSRS. HANWELL AND PARKER;
BY MESSRS. ELMSLY AND BREMNER, F. AND C. RIVINGTON,
AND J. HATCHARD, LONDON.
MDCCXCVIII.

IMPRIMATUR,

MICH. MARLOW,
VICE-CAN. OXON.

COLL. DI. JO. BAPT.
Dec. 15. 1798.

TO
THE TREASURER
AND
MASTERS OF THE BENCH
OF THE
HON^{BLE} SOCIETY OF LINCOLN'S INN,
THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE,
PREACHED IN THEIR CHAPEL,
AND
PRINTED AT THEIR REQUEST,
IS
WITH THE UTMOST RESPECT AND GRATITUDE
INSCRIBED
BY
THEIR MOST OBLIGED
AND FAITHFUL SERVANT,

W. JACKSON.

CH. CH. OXFORD,
Dec. 15, 1798.

THE TREASURY

AND

MASTERS OF THE BRANCH

OF THE

HONORARY SOCIETY OF LINGUISTS

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PSALM xxviii. 7.

*The Lord is my strength, and my shield; my heart
trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my
heart greatly rejoiceth, and with my song will
I praise him.*

AMIDST the events of prosperity and success, such at least as affect our happiness more materially, the mind of man acts in entire agreement with the affections implanted in it, in giving way to the strong feelings of joy and exultation. They are the emotions which are excited in us by the very constitution of our nature; nor on the other hand is there any precept either of morality or religion, by which it is forbidden to man to indulge them. It needs not any laboured argument to prove also, that, upon the increase of public felicity or public glory, public exultation is equally natural, and equally allowable. It is amongst the first propensities of an honest mind at least, to be forward

ward in rejoicing, when occasion offers, not for ourselves alone, but *for our brethren and companions' sake*—And he must be of a morose and gloomy temper indeed, who refuses to mix in the general satisfaction, who feels not rather his own happiness itself increased, by partaking of the happiness of others.

In every nation therefore, upon deliverance from great evil either experienced or apprehended, or upon any distinguished accession to the common glory or welfare, public and national rejoicings have perpetually been instituted. In our own country, as is well known, they have been frequent in every age, and in every period of our history; whilst the blessings which called for them, furnish the abundant testimony, that the favour of Heaven has at all times been extended to this nation in an especial manner, and in the most signal instances both of deliverance and protection vouchsafed to it.

If ever at the same time there was substantial ground for the people of this land giving way to the feelings of joy, or making the public demonstration of it, well may it be asserted, that scarcely ever did the occasion present itself
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more truly, or more unambiguously, than in the present moment—never within our own memory assuredly, or in the times recently elapsed. For it is not now any single success in war, or the escape from any single danger, which we are bound to commemorate; but the magnitude of the mercy vouchsafed to us is to be estimated from the importance of many great and repeated blessings, which in rapid succession even we have lately experienced—and the relief given to our apprehensions must be felt in proportion to the fearful threatenings of the storm which gathered all around, and seemed so long ready from every side to burst upon us.

In satisfying the duty then, which I am called upon to perform this day before you, I have no hesitation in the first instance, and with every view even to the religious attentions which I am afterwards to insist upon, to enter into the plain detail of the evils themselves, from which now at length we entertain the humble hope, in God's due season, of release and deliverance. The account may be painful indeed, and the topic itself may perhaps also seem not well to agree with the declared purpose of this day's solemnity. But to make the review may still

be salutary, and in the end may serve likewise but the more to confirm the very joy, which is now the common sensation of mind amongst us.

THE CONTEST then, in which we have been now so long engaged, has been a contest, as all men know, not for the common ends, for which war is undertaken—for the extension of territory or commerce, for the avenging of national honour insulted, or the faith of treaties violated—but for the preservation itself of all those interests which are dearest to man, and all those rights which are essential not to the aggrandizement and prosperity, but to the very existence of a free and independent nation. The struggle has been against an adversary, whose professed aim it was, through the whole earth, if he were able, to loose all the bonds of civil order and established government—and long also were his arms opposed by us at the expence of the best blood and treasure of this nation, without any progress appearing to be made in the repressing his haughtiness, or the curbing his violence.

It cannot be forgotten likewise, with what diligence (I wish it could not be said also in some degree, with what success) other engines of mischief

mischiefe and destruction were turned against us —how poisonous doctrines were introduced, and baleful opinions of Philosophy falsely so called were disseminated amongst us, with all the malignity of endeavour to taint and corrupt even the soil itself, in which the fairest fruits of liberty and well-ordered government were seen to flourish.

Out of such evils in the mean time, and according also to the common order and course of things, there grew up another likewise, of no less magnitude. For whilst all was thus adverse from without, the ravage of war increasing, and the menaces of the enemy becoming more and more violent, the turbulence of ignorant men gathered strength at home, and the clamour of dissolute and desperate men grew loud, demanding that here also some new experiment in civil government should be tried, and calling out that we should quit that, the abiding by which was the only probable mean of saving us from a common wreck, and which also, as we trust in God, hath so saved us.

There were moreover, in this fearful condition of things amongst us, many other circumstances of the worst kind, which seemed to place

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us upon the very brink and verge even of the most extreme danger: some, which I forbear to mention, for it were far better that all note and memory of them were extinguished—others the more immediate visitations of heaven; as when the earth yielded not her fruits of increase, and the cry of scarcity was heard amongst us—or untoward circumstances arising from particular conjunctures of things; at one time the rapid falling away of those alliances which we had contracted for common support against the enemy—at another, the hazards to which public credit was exposed, and the difficulties under which it laboured—and most recently, the violence of open rebellion in a kingdom connected with us by every tie both of consanguinity and common interest.

If we look back to the manners and habits of the nation also, in the beginning at least of the contest which has been described, it is to be feared that the decay of religion and piety was but too visible amongst us, and that we shewed little of a conscientious discharge of duty, that best security for the divine favour, amidst a libertinism to which there seemed scarcely any bounds, and a licentiousness so confident, that not seldom it appeared openly to defy all restraint.

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The statement of evils to which a nation may be exposed, cannot well perhaps be carried further : but if such were the evils of our own situation, and the country in reality was so endangered, well may it be understood what the national sensation must be, when the gloom seems at length to be dissipated, and the peril is removed to the distance at which, thanks be to God, it now appears to be both at home and abroad.

ALL the honest feelings then of national pride and exultation are fairly and consistently to be indulged—nor, as before, does the holy religion of the Gospel either restrain or forbid them—It is the business of that Gospel only to give the right direction to them, and to teach us how the just and fit use is to be made of the various circumstances which call them forth. It is such caution and such consideration also, which I am now especially to insist upon before you, both as the Minister of God's Word, and because so likewise may I best employ your attention after the solemn offices of devotion, in which by the ordinance of public authority we have now been united.

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WHATSOEVER then may have been the success of our arms, or however the prudence and wisdom of the civil Governors of this land may have at length contributed to the peace and security of it, the first and chief duty, which the religion of the Gospel inculcates, is, that we ascribe the glory not unto ourselves, but unto God alone. For we act not agreeably even to the first notions and principles of true religion, if we confess not without difference or exception, that the issues of all things are in the hands of God. ^a *Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?* Or again, if it be the dispensation of mercy—if deliverance from evil, or prosperity in any kind, fall out unto the sons of men, it is God's providence which is to be had in remembrance, his goodness which is to be magnified, and his name which is to be praised ^b *from the rising up of the sun unto the going down of the same.* All is unhallowed, however it may be called devotion or the service of piety, if we begin not with this first offer of worship unto God—All is hypocrisy, if with our thanksgiving there be not this humiliation of ourselves, together with the entire and perfect acknowledgment of the power and mercy of the Almighty.

^a Amos iii. 6.^b Psalm cxiii. 3.

It is at once to be understood also, that in this very humiliation and this acknowledgment we take in fact the truest glory to ourselves, whilst we make our boast, that *the Lord is on our side*: and whilst the enemy who is vanquished shall hear, when fame shall report to him the histories of our triumph—even he who maketh a mock at the Almighty shall hear (and at length perhaps stand appalled at it), that ‘*GOD IS OUR HOPE AND STRENGTH*—that *our song and our praise is of him*—and that *we are telling of his salvation from day to day*.

BUT this duty performed, there remain others also, by which the present solemnity is to be sanctified in the sight of God, and by the discharge of which alone, advantage is to be derived to ourselves from the devotion of it. We are called upon to approve our sincerity in the observance of it, by strict examination of our lives and consciences according to the rule of God’s Word, by putting away iniquity from amongst us, and by resolving to exercise ourselves more faithfully hereafter unto righteousness and all good works. For it is a mean and base notion of religious duties, to think that the only season for practising them, or the most fitting at least,

is when danger compasseth us about, or when, from the evil which is at hand, men's hearts fail them through fear. There is another fear by which we have need to be actuated, and that of a kind also, which is connected with a principle more noble and generous—the fear in the day of prosperity, lest we incur the reproach of ingratitude towards Him, *who crowneth us with benefits*—the fear lest we forfeit the favour which the Almighty hath vouchsafed to us, by our own unworthiness and our own wickedness. ^d *We beseech you therefore, even in the Apostle's language in a far greater argument—We beseech you as brethren, by the mercies of God, that henceforth ye present yourselves holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.* For what consistency can be pretended in giving thanks to a benefactor, and yet despising his will? what sense of religion in praising and acknowledging the power of God, and at the same time giving no heed to the law of his commandments? If we would have it believed even, that we take any true interest in the public welfare or glory, let us seek to sustain it, as best it may be sustained, every one adding to the common piety, and making his own conduct more exemplary and virtuous; ^e *For righteousness ex-*

^d Rom. xii. 1.

alteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people.

In the midst of our successes also, and of the great things which God hath done for us, we are called upon to use more than common caution that we become not vain and insolent, or, in Scripture language, *that our hearts be not lifted up, and hardened in pride*. For the danger is greatest, lest we fall into this condemnation, when public blessings are vouchsafed, in which all degrees and ranks of persons in the community feel an interest; when the voice of joy, I had almost said of tumultuous joy, is in all our borders; and when every man is speaking proud things, none choosing to appear less zealous than another, in magnifying the common glory. But it is then likewise, that we have most need to suffer a due sense of religion to make us lowly and humble, and to abate the confidence which prosperity might otherwise inspire. Let it be remembered, and remembered especially too after the signal mercies which God hath vouchsafed to us, upon what a precipice we lately stood; how perilous and full of fear the situation was, from which we seem

* Prov. xiv. 34.

at length after so much struggle and anxiety to have escaped! But let us have no imagination at the same time, *that our mountain is made strong—that we cannot be removed*—and that our enemy is the sole object of God's displeasure, or that he must be so above all other men. *'I tell you, Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.'*

It is a great occasion also, when the State to which we belong is prosperous, and when it has attained to new glory and pre-eminence—the occasion, I say, is then a great one surely, for stirring up in the heart all those virtues which belong to the love of country—to make us watchful over the true interests of it, anxious to support the Laws and Constitution of it, and ready to provide for the public necessities, by all the means which private opulence and fortune afford. To do this is to act indeed but according to common wisdom, and political prudence. Besides which, it is justice only thus to repay in affection and support, what we receive in security and reputation; and to return to the State cheerfully, in such kind as we are able, the advantage which we derive from the common prosperity. But we may state even more

^f Luke xiii. 3.

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than this—whatever it be, by which we may contribute to the support and aid of our country, to give this aid is a duty, which in some sense has the obligation even of *Religion* attached to it. For it is the establishment and ordinance of God himself, that men should dwell together in societies. To withhold therefore what may tend in any way to the advantage of our country, to the security or good estate of the society to which we belong, is to counteract His will, and to conduct ourselves otherwise, than in agreement with the ends which He has ordained.

I seek not however to pursue the reflections, such as those which I have now made, to a greater length. It is to be wished only that our prosperity and our virtue should keep pace with each other; and, as we boast ourselves to be a people favoured of Heaven, that both our piety and our patriotism should increase, in proportion to the greater importance of the mercies vouchsafed to us.—God be thanked also, that in what regards our duty, a better mind and diligence seems daily to appear amongst us—a stronger sense of the power and wisdom and goodness of God, a greater zeal for his honour, and more firm exertion for the preservation
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of order, and lawful Government, from a just sense of the benefits derived to us from them—nor can it indeed well be otherwise. It cannot be, according to all common reasoning, but that such must have been the effect upon our own conduct, of the unexampled miseries in which we have seen a great and powerful nation involved, from their making a scorn on the one hand of all religion, and of the holy Revelation even of the Gospel itself; and on the other from self-interest, the rapacity of individuals, and false pretences of patriotism taking place of all real love of country, of all good faith, and honest concern for the public good. But if it be the case likewise, that the evils under which we ourselves have suffered, or the dangers which have come nigh us—that these also have tended in any degree to make us a more humble, a more sober, and religious people, let us be ready, with the praise offered this day unto the Almighty, to render thanks unto God for this the mercy of his chastisement also—for the correction which he hath given us, not in judgment, but in patience and long-suffering, checking the progress of our wickedness, and awakening us to a sense of duty before iniquity became our ruin.

But I detain you still, it is to be feared,
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beyond what is necessary; and I may appear perhaps also, too much to have left unnoticed the events themselves, which are the special occasions of the appointment of this day's solemnity. But I have done this at the same time not undesignedly.—The signal interpositions of God's providence in our favour so lately experienced cannot want enumeration, whilst every heart and countenance declare, what the people of this land ascribe to the benefits conferred by them.—From the bravery of our countrymen likewise, now so often and so decisively victorious, I can have had no wish to withhold the acknowledgment paid by all; but I have feared only to tarnish the lustre of it by weak and inefficient praise. What an whole kingdom greets with acclamation also, there is little need for the individual to extol with words—and the adversaries with whom we are engaged may say better than ourselves likewise (for now in their turn have they all felt the full force of it) what is the power and strength of BRITISH valour combined with BRITISH discipline.

To the glory of a late exploit especially, and to the fame of that high deed, to which we can scarcely find a parallel, it were idle to
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think of adding by any recital of it—nations abroad confessing it to have been their mighty deliverance, and all men standing in amazement both at the magnitude and the bravery of it. I speak not at the same time either of the exultation or gratitude with which the accounts of this great event were received amongst ourselves; but they were not moderate, or such, I believe, as often have been exceeded upon the occasion of any success in war experienced by this country. For the action itself furnished the rare instance of a conflict, in which the highest skill and the greatest intrepidity had the fullest opportunity of being displayed—and in which both also were so conspicuous, that it is doubtful which was of most renown, or contributed most to the “great victory” won by our arms in the late fearful battle—a victory, under God’s providence so memorable, and of such defeat to those who rose up against us, that they which are yet to come, and the children which are unborn even, when they entreat the Almighty against their enemies, may pray unto him and say, *Break thou their strength, O Lord, and consume them—Do unto them, as thou didst in the days of old, and as* [§] AT THE STREAM OF EGYPT.

§ Isaiah xxvii. 12.

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BUT I forbear—to the religious service of this day likewise, there belong other employments rather, than the praise of men, and other duties. The one part of these duties also in some degree has already been fulfilled by us. We have performed the vow unto the Lord, and have offered unto him the sacrifice of thanksgiving. And even now again with solemn adoration do we offer it—^h *For thine, O LORD, is the Greatness, and the Power, and the Glory, and the Victory, and the Majesty; all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the Kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as the head above all.*

GOD GRANT, in what remains to be accomplished on our own part, that we be sincere and constant also; that by purity and holiness, and by the diligent practice of all Christian virtues, we secure to ourselves the favour of Heaven, and continue to be the objects of divine protection; that *this day also may be for a memorial unto us continually*—for that in this day we praised GOD with an holy solemnity, and turned ourselves unto him likewise, *with all our strength, and all our heart, and all our mind.*

^h I Chron. xxix. 11.

So may we entertain the hope—so may we find our consolation, and the support of our piety, in the devout and humble hope at least, that we shall receive a blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of all mercy—when we shall have done, that is, according to our best ability, that which we are commanded to do, both to the glory of God, and for the security of our own greatest and final interests. For thus is it written, and thus even is the promise made—ⁱ *Whofo offereth me thanks and praise, he honoureth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright, shall be shewn the salvation of God.*

ⁱ Psalm l. 23.

